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7th Forum of the Commanders of the European Land Forces

“The challenges of the European Armies and the cooperative security opportunities to overcome them”

Is the creation of the European Army a necessity?

Athens, 11 November 2021

Dear Gentlemen, Chiefs of the European Armies,

Dear General Lalousis,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for your kind invitation to participate in your Forum. I hope that you enjoy your staying in Greece because I am more the certain that General Lalousis and his staff did their best for that. I enjoy it personally. We thank them.

The well known saying goes like *“A direct question request a direct answer”* and therefore my reply to the question of this panel *“Is the creation of a European Army a necessity?”* is a strong, bold and loud *“Yes, it is”*.

And then the obvious follow on question pops up: What kind of an Army does Europe need? Is the European Army a possible reality or a deliberate delusion?

Let's take things from the beginning.

First and foremost, for the EU MS, national defence and security are national responsibility. The MS have to be able to defend their own territory and their sovereignty. In order to be able to do so, against a stronger or more capable threat, they participate in Alliances like NATO, which take responsibility of the Collective Defense of their members. Collective Defence of Europe therefore is a NATO responsibility. This has not changed and will not change in the foreseeable future.

This was the situation when in 2016 the EU launched the EU Global Strategy (EUGS). With the adoption of this Strategy, the EU has launched an ambitious and substantial two-fold effort. First line of effort was to upgrade itself to a credible global geopolitical player, providing security and stability to the Member States in their territory and protecting their interests. Second line of effort was to define new strategic tasks representing its practical level of ambition, setting thus the foundation for Strategic Autonomy, although nowhere in the EUGS, was this clearly stated. In the EUGS, the main strategic tasks for the EU were described as follows: Crisis Management, Support to Partners and Protection of Europe.

Following the Joint EU-NATO Declarations, task deconfliction with NATO is now clear, at least in the mind of the average European citizen. NATO should concentrate on collective defence, while the EU should be in the lead for all crisis management, human security and human rights related issues. The key words that best describe and govern EU-NATO relationship are mutual reinforcement and burden sharing.

This was the situation until recently, with EU politicians making from time-to-time statements to the media on the necessity of a European Army. Unfortunately, there was no actual follow-up or clear actions towards that target.

The latest events in Afghanistan have rekindled the ever-creeping discussions about a possible European Army. The EU leadership mentioned a 5.000-strong force (essentially a Brigade) to be set up,

while in other discussions Helsinki's 1999 "Primary Goal" of a force of 50-60.000 troops reappeared. Last month in Brussels, at the EUMC at CHODs level, discussions and staff procedures were initiated for an "EU Rapid Response Toolbox" and a new EU Battlegroup (EUBG) concept, based on current geopolitical requirements and EU needs. But is really the creation of a credible force within the EU's intentions and capabilities or will the effort end ingloriously, without result?

During the Global Strategy Implementation Phase, EU MS and the EU institutions realized that the new GS tools that were initiated (CARD, PESCO, EDF, EPF), are overwhelmingly focused on either

- The Industrial / technical development of some defense capabilities or on
- The development of the defense industry.

But something was missing.

As important as these two factors remain, in order to restore hard military power, there is a third factor that must also be included. This third factor is the potential for:

- Real, dynamic military involvement with troops on the ground, in the face of an unfolding international crisis.

In the meantime, at the strategic level, the EU as well as the MS realized that if the EU was seeking for a more important global role and a higher security profile, three strategic/political factors were necessary:

- Political credibility in decision-making,
- "Strategic Autonomy", the new EU requirement and the more practical requirement ,
- Real dynamic troop deployment capabilities in time and the necessary for the situation organization of forces and configuration of weapons, based on the existence and availability (at national or European level) of the necessary

military capabilities required to implement dynamic operational engagement.

What happened in Kabul last August must never be forgotten. The EU should not continue pretending that it is possible to play a role in the geopolitical arena without having concrete dynamic action capabilities.

Having explained that, I hope that it is now clear to all of us that a military force is a necessity for the EU. We could call it "*European Army*" or better "*European Military Force*", although it really does not make any difference". As I mentioned before, there is no provision for a European Army anywhere in the Treaties or in any other capstone EU document. The three EU Operations and the four Training Missions that are currently active, they are all set up in an *ad-hoc* manner, tailored to fulfil a specific purpose and portraying unique organization and forces set up. The same applies to the system of the multinational EU Battlegroups, created since 2007 to become (unsuccessfully to date) the European Immediate Reaction Forces.

In a non-paper earlier this year, 14 EU MS made a specific proposal. They supported the creation of a "*First Entry Force*" of 5.000 troops, which would be organized around an Army brigade, reinforced with air and naval elements. As I mentioned before, last month in Brussels at the EUMC at CHODs level, discussions took place and staff procedures were initiated for the creation of a "Rapid Response Toolbox" and a new EU BG concept based on current geopolitical requirements and EU needs.

At this point and since there are no other open sources information and the Staffs have already began working in high gear, I would like to share with you some personal thoughts on this issue.

The ability to deploy a Brigade, which now sounds like the most obvious solution, would indeed provide the EU with a wider range of options in a short time. But this is the "*nominal value*". Not enough. The underlying danger is that the MS, as usually is the case, will

interpret even this lowest common denominator proposal in a minimalistic way, that is, as a call for the creation of a single multinational brigade for EU operations. This could provide a political alibi and be hailed as a success or a breakthrough, creating the usual euphoria and igniting a round of applauses. Unfortunately, it would be too little for the following reasons:

- A single Brigade can obviously deal with only one crisis at a time, and possibly, not any crisis. The EU should be able to deal with more than one in its periphery at any given moment. A Brigade does not split.

- There are many types of brigades. Any given brigade will never be suitable to deploy in every theatre, against all possible adversaries. A number of brigades, of different composition, organization and training are required to cover a wider range of risks.

- More than a single "*First Entry Force*" is required, for the simple reason that "*Follow on Forces*", which are replacement forces from the EU MS, should also be provided to continue the operation. A Brigade can be deployed, according to international standards, only for 4-6 months and its personnel cannot remain in readiness status or in deployment forever. Therefore, the deployment of one Brigade, requires the existence of at least two additional Brigades as Follow on Forces (three Brigades in total) for the same mission, where one will be undergoing pre-deployment training, the second will be deployed and the third, having returned, will be reorganizing and recovering. And the rotation would repeat.

What is needed, in my opinion, is a multinational formation at the size of an Army Corps, comprising of a number of national Brigades (preferably a multiple of three), that will form the basic building blocks of this multinational force. National brigades must not alternate. They must be permanently assigned to the Multinational Corps and participate in annual multinational exercises. Some countries have the tendency to assign to standing multinational units, different units every time, in the hope that they will all benefit

from the experience and the multinational training. This is unfortunately far from the truth and actually, as experience has proved, quite counter-productive. Training and experience are as a consequence lost, together with the millions of euros spent, while it hampers the overall performance of the multinational unit as a whole. This unfortunately is the case with the Battlegroups. Therefore, the new proposal of the 5.000-strong force, Brigade size, is incomplete and obviously based on political aspirations or expediencies without taking into account the views of military advisers. As mentioned, they are a *"nominal value"*. Therefore, although this idea is a good start, much more than 5.000 troops are needed for the so called *"European Military Force"*.

It may sound strange, but the model for such a scheme already exists. It is being developed as one of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) programs, under the name CROC (Crisis Response Operational Core). CROC is designed to decisively contribute to the creation of a coherent full spectrum force package, which could accelerate the provision of forces for dealing with crises.

The *"European Military Force"* could be designed in such a way as to finally create a European military tool but also to achieve the *"Headline Goal"*. We should not forget that this, despite reservations and amendments, remains the final official EU level of ambition. In reality this is the minimum level of ambition required in the contemporary strategic environment. Europeans can easily implement it since they actually have very large armed forces and they collectively spend annually well above 200 billion euros on defense, being second only to the US.

Our experience from the Battlegroups indicates that MS are not eager to shoulder the cost of their troops participating in EU missions. This was one of the reasons (the other being the lack of political will) the Battlegroups were never deployed. To give you an idea of the cost, a Battlegroup costs around 100 million euros for a 6 month deployment. MS are surprisingly not ready to pay this amount of money for an EU mission. I strongly believe that the NATO principle *"cost lays where it falls"* should not apply for the EU, since

it appears to be a game-stopper. It should change and I believe it will. For the first time in EU's history, the EU Budget, aka MFF (Multiannual Financial Framework) 2021-27 features a section on defence and security. This was a real breakthrough, a ground breaking decision. Many problems of a future European military force will be solved, if the MS agree that this force will enjoy the benefits of common funding and a separate EU budget.

It is certain that some MS, each for its own reasons will raise serious objections, under the fear that this development would affect NATO's capabilities. In reality, this "European Military Force", like any other EU military force, could affect NATO, in a positive way. It could join, for instance, a NATO Rapid Reaction Force as one of the Army Corps provided for NATO defense planning, under certain conditions and only if Article 5 is invoked. Non-NATO and unwilling MS could automatically withdraw their forces. The "*European Army*", instead of an obstacle would become a way (perhaps the only way) to fulfill at the same time the goals of EU and NATO, should the EU MS agree.

Concluding, EU MS need military forces not to defend but to protect their citizens, to preserve the European way of life, to support their diplomacy and to manage and stabilize crises outside Europe. These will be the tasks of the European Military Force or European Army.

I stop here and I am ready for your questions. Thank you for your attendance.